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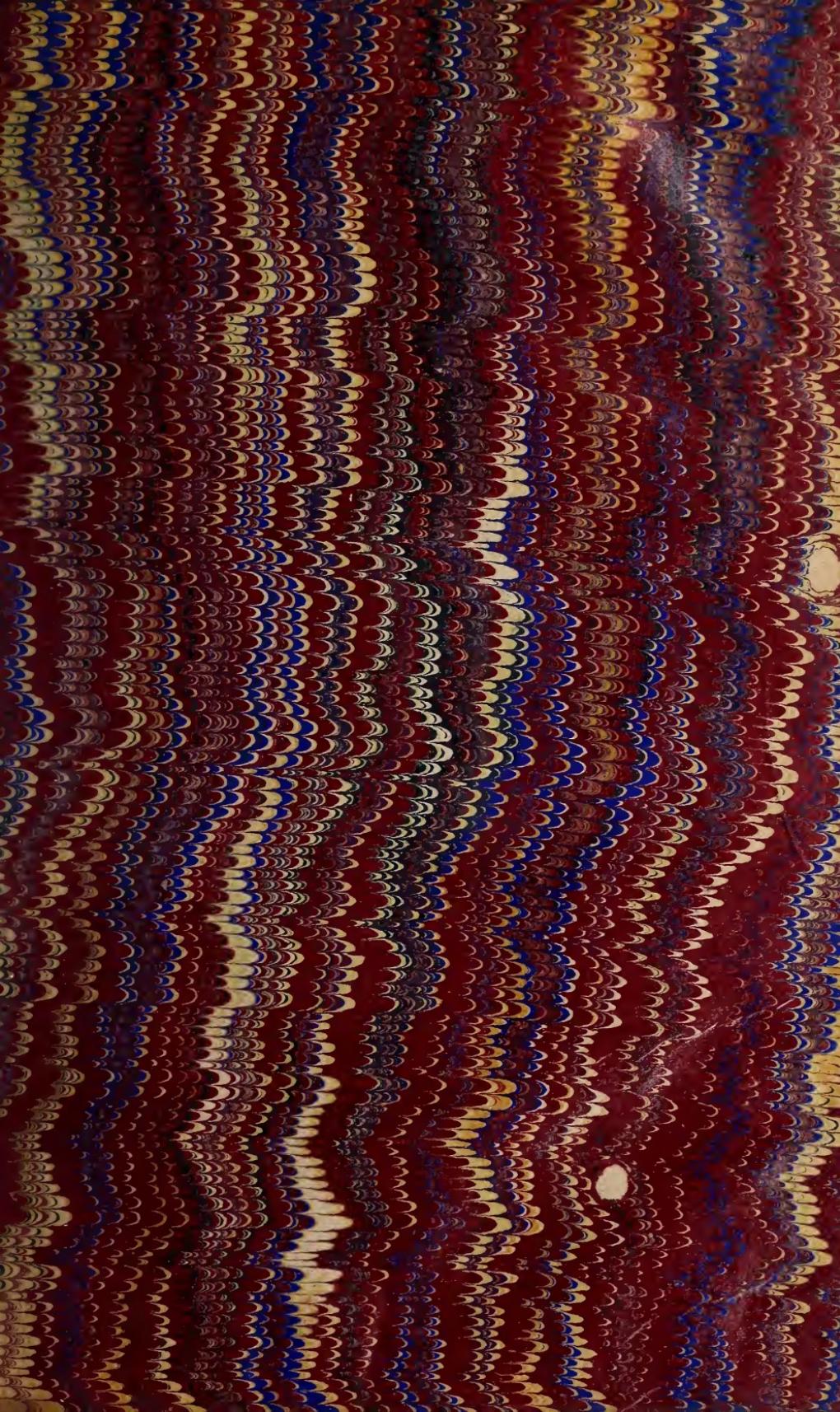
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



THE THEOLOGIES.

BY

GERRIT SMITH.

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GERRIT SMITH.

THE THEOLOGIES.

THAT the living theologies will all fall into the tomb of the long-ago-dead ones, and will, like Greek and Roman mythology, be remembered but to illustrate superstition, to adorn a speech or enliven a page, is what no one should doubt. This is to be the fate not only of the rude and unsystematized theologies, which stand in the traditions of the barbarous and illiterate, but also of the widely-prevailing theological systems that are found, or claimed to be found, in the Bible, the Koran, and the other authoritative "Sacred Books." Whilst, however, we are sure that, in the progress of science and civilization, these heaviest of all the curses of earth will pass away, we nevertheless have abundant reason to fear that this joyful event will not be until after still more of long and weary ages. That the theologies are this preëminent infliction on the human family is but too obviously true. They do more than all things else to darken life, to shut out sweet sunshine from the soul, to fill it with trembling apprehension, and to sink it in agony and despair. Who but the Hindoo himself can tell what the Hindoo suffers from his horror of transmigration and from other horrors inspired by his theology? Does the Bible man suffer much less? As a general thing, he does. But it is not mainly because his theology is much less terrific—for it is not. It is mainly because, his intelligence being greater, his faith is less absolute and absorbing. Moreover, a considerable share of the Bible men flatter themselves that, by means of their technical or magic change, they will escape the common doom. The proportion of Hindoos who expect to escape it is probably far less. But the pain inflicted by the theologies is not all. What can more debase and shrivel the soul, as well as distress it, than

this “fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries?”—than this belief not only of living all one’s life here and hereafter, but even of being born, under “the wrath of God?”

It is, indeed, encouraging to see so many of the wise and good at work to reform and improve the theologies. But far more encouraging is it to see others of this class at work to abolish them. Nothing of these hideous structures, which have for so many centuries cast their baleful shadows over the whole earth, should be left standing. There are, we confess, many great and precious truths scattered through these theologies. Nevertheless, nothing of all the superstitiously and cunningly-devised systems which contain them; not one shred of all the fabrics of fancy and fraud into which they are woven; nor of all the black pictures, broad caricatures, and abominable misrepresentations of God and man, which these theologies have imposed upon the credulity of their disciples, should be suffered to survive. We do not deny that these theologies can be somewhat reformed and improved. But they can not be made harmless, nor even less than mighty for evil, except by annihilating them.

That these theologies are not soon to disappear should, instead of being allowed to discourage us, but serve to make us more impatient to have the right and effectual blows struck at them. They, who are only pruning their branches, should be wielding axes upon their roots. They, who are at work to make them better, should be at work to overturn them from their lowest foundations. Some of these would, for conscience’ sake, retain the theological systems, were they but modified here and there. Others, however, of these superficial workers, would be glad to be more thorough, could they believe that they would thereby hasten the overthrow of these systems. They *would* thereby hasten it. Going for a whole truth is more effective than going for a part of one—the whole one being the more obvious, the more commanding of approbation, and, every way, the more powerful and influential. On this principle the public mind is far better prepared for the entire flinging away than for the partial retention of the theologies.

But why am I so utterly intolerant of the theologies? It is

chiefly because they not only stand in the way of religion, but are so confounded with it, as to be taken for it. The bloody worship of Juggernaut is religion in one part of the world. In another, belief in the marvels told by and of Mohammed is religion; and in another, belief in the unrivaled fish story, and that Balaam's ass did actually speak. This illustrates the power of the theologies to usurp the place of religion, and pass themselves off for it. Roman Catholicism allowed her theology to carry her so far away from religion, as to involve her in the measureless guilt of setting up the Inquisition. So, too, it was letting their theology become their religion, that led Roman Catholics and Protestants to the wholesale slaughter of each other. A few words in the Bible respecting a curse belched forth by a drunken man have been the justification of large portions of Christendom for sinking tens of millions of Africans in the pit of slavery. It is true that the Greeks and Romans were slaveholders, and that it was not because they had an authoritative "Sacred Book" to sanction it—for they did not have it. But it must be remembered that with them slavery was intended to be a step forward in humanity and civilization. It was consenting to let prisoners of war live. A few words in the Bible have sufficed to sink woman from her natural equality with man into his inferior and servant. She is beginning to complain of the extensive denial of her civil and the entire denial of her political rights. But in vain her complaint, so long as the theologies are an admitted authority. The first thing for woman to do toward regaining her freedom, is to free herself from the power of the theologies. This is the fountain-head of her oppressions. She will never succeed in throwing off her multiplied wrongs so long as she consents to let this great authoritative wrong, which lies back of them, and produces them, continue to exist. So long as it exists, she can gain but little by summoning to her help the pleas of reason and nature; for even reason and nature are powerless in the presence of a hostile and admitted authority. In proceeding under this head, I need not particularize the wars which have come from the theologies. I need not refer to the rivers of blood which have flowed from contentions about a single theological dogma — that, for instance, regarding the grade of

Christ's being. Gifted, learned, admired individuals have, as well as the masses, fallen under the misleading influences, and sometimes under the infernal sway, of these theologies. By giving the reins to theology instead of religion, the very intellectual and very conscientious Jonathan Edwards became a severe and persistent slaveholder. In this wise, too, the perhaps no less intellectual and conscientious Calvin consented to the burning of Servetus. In this connection, let me remark that the conscientious theologian, who makes his theology his religion, is the most striking of all the instances in which conscience, instead of restraining from crime, impels to it. An unconscientious man may have a creed, but he is comparatively unconcerned to enforce it. Beware, however, of the conscientious man whose judgment is perverted, and who is tempted to intolerance and persecution! Especially beware of the conscientious man, who makes one of these false theologies his religion! For both his theology and his moral sense—in other words, his idol and his conscience—command him to be unrelenting. Nor are the theologies, as the unreflecting might suppose, confined to their especial channels. Everywhere they overflow their banks. Everywhere they mingle their dark and turbid waters with the bright and gladdening streams of life. All our affections and all our affairs are exposed to their poisonous and perverting influences. The natural and therefore healthy loves and hates are modified and made morbid by these unnatural and monstrous theologies. Even Government itself is still called on to look to them as its authority, and to let them shape its policies and prompt its conduct. Amongst the noticeable recent instances of this are the sermons of Dr. Booth, of New-York, and Dr. Hall, of Northampton, in which our Government is virtually advised to look into a theology, especially into the doctrine of the atonement, for light and guidance in regard to its disposition of the Southern rebels. With such clergymen the paramount question is not what natural justice, but what theological justice, calls for—not what reason, but what the Book they assume to be revelation demands. And here let me say, that there is but one hope that the theologies, so long as they shall be authority in the Church, will not again rule in our civil courts and civil councils, as they once

did in a portion of our country. This hope is, that the counter-action outside of the Church will continue to be superior to the forces within it. Very true is it that the Church does, in many respects, benefit the world. But no less true is it that the world needs to protect itself from the Church; and that the protection will continue to be vitally needed so long as the theologies shall, by her recognition of their authority, make the Church a source of frightful peril to the world. Remember that Matthew Hale administered the law of witchcraft—the very witchcraft which the great and good but superstitious John Wesley made belief in to be essential to belief in the Bible.* Let the Church again get the upper-hand of the world, and jurists as pure and wise as even Matthew Hale will administer the absurd laws of absurd theology. Nay, in that event, as bloody horrors as ever theology-inspired law-makers and judges were guilty of, will be perpetrated. This will be so, however, only as long as the Church shall continue to let theology stand in the place of religion. She will become a rich and unqualified blessing to the world just so soon as her religion shall cast out her theology. That the danger of our own Government's falling under theological sway is not yet past, is manifest from the present endeavor of very numerous theologians to get the Federal Constitution into their hands. To embody in that Paper some leading theological dogma—such, for instance, as that Jesus Christ is the ruler of nations—would, in the light of its broadening results, be a calamity, perhaps more to be deplored than our great rebellion.

I have spoken of these theologies as authoritative. It is true that they are not so, certainly not always so, upon the great ecclesiastical leaders. The Luthers, Swedenborgs, and other of these leaders stretch and shorten and shape them as they will. But the masses, on whom the theologies, however modified, are absolutely binding, have no appeal from them; no right to inquire into their claims to credence; no right to cast so much as one doubt upon those claims.

What I am writing will give offense, not only because it throws into one category all the theologies, but because, in doing so, it also throws into one category all the "Sacred Books" from which it is claimed they are derived—the Bible

* What multitudes have been burnt or otherwise put to death, because of the wicked line in the Bible: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live!"—Read Lecky on Rationalism.

as well as the Koran and the others. Are there not, however, respects enough in which these Books resemble each other, to justify the classing of them together for the purposes of my argument? The theologies drawn from them all are absurd and monstrous. The Books are all lacking in the amount of evidence necessary to establish their authenticity and genuineness. They all have but slender external evidences of the truth of their contents—so very slender that nothing in any of them should be received as certain truth, but what carries in itself the evidence that it is truth. Whilst the Sermon on the Mount is intrinsically and manifestly true—the truth of it shining by its own light—there is not only nothing in the ordinary histories and narratives of the Bible to make it certain that they are true, but next to nothing in the outward proofs and collateral testimonies to this end. In the case of its extraordinary histories and narratives, especially those which embody miracles, there, of course, lie both these objections to credibility and the additional one of the inherent improbability, not to say, in some instances, inherent impossibility, of the things related. And yet, strange to say, the miracles of the Bible are cited to prove the truth of the Bible, as well as their being in the Bible to prove the truth of themselves. But, however true the miracles, they can answer for themselves only—not for the other parts of the Bible. So, too, the prophecies, which also are claimed to prove the truth of the Bible, and in turn to be proved by the Bible, can, in no event, do more than prove themselves. Were the Bible one book, instead of scores of books of widely different ages stitched together—the production of one mind instead of many minds—there would be some plausibility in the claim, that one part of it goes to prove another. As it is, the claim is simply and utterly absurd. This vicious circular reasoning, which, in the present instance, allows naked assumptions to prove each other, would equally allow each in a company of detected rogues to swear his companions clear.

The simple fact is, that we have no moral right to believe the whole of the Bible. The man, who believes every thing in it to be true, believes it, not in obedience to the laws of evidence, which are also the laws of his being, and therefore the laws of

his God, but in defiance of them. He believes it, not rationally, but superstitiously ; not because of what it is, but because it is in the Bible.

Have I made a poor book of the Bible ? I have not meant to do so ; for, although there are things in it which are foolish ; and things in it which physical science shows to be false ; and things in it condemned by moral science also—I, nevertheless, hold it to be the best book in the world. That it contains our earliest record of the words of the wisest, holiest, sublimest man that ever lived, is of itself enough to give it the preëminence amongst all books. Second, however, only to the words of Jesus, are the best words of the prophets and apostles, who speak to us in this book. But how can I know that Jesus was, if I do not know that all the Bible is true ? I admit that I do not certainly know when nor where he was born, nor what was his name. But that such a man lived is proved by his words—words such as no other man had equaled. Is it said that they were the words of some other person ? I answer that then this other person was himself the Jesus, and was only too modest or discreet to own it. He, from whom the wondrous words came—whenever he was, wherever he was, whoever he was, whatever his name—was the true Jesus. We assure ourselves that Jesus existed much in the way that we assure ourselves of the existence of some other very eminent person of the past. It is not from the scanty and uncertain materials which make up his biography that we are sure Shakespeare lived. But, in the light of certain compositions, which are evidently the coinage of the same brain, we are sure that there did live—we can not tell precisely when nor where, nor even know we under what name—an unequaled dramatic writer. Shakespeare is no myth : and by similar reasoning Jesus is no myth.

I have spoken highly of the Bible. That it abounds in the intensest national egotism and in the intensest national scorn and hatred, and in the falsest views of God, is only what might be expected from the narrow vision of most of its writers, and of the people to whom they belonged. For, remember, that the Jews regarded the earth as a plane of but a few thousand miles in circumference ; the sun, moon, and stars as but candles

for it; and the one work of God to love and care for them, and to hate and destroy their neighbors. Alas! our folly in letting a people so ignorant and so mistaken make up our Bible! If we must have a Bible—that is, a binding “Sacred Book”—how much more rational to let the advanced physical and moral science of modern times furnish it! How irrational to turn our back upon the great light of the present, and to keep our face toward the thick darkness of the past!

With all its faults, the Bible, were it allowed to take its chance with other books, and be judged, as they are, simply by its merits, would be a blessing above all price. But so long as it is imposed upon us as an authority, and our faith in one part of it required to be as full as in every other—as unquestioning in the story of the standing still of the sun and moon as in the wisest words of Jesus—so long will it be like to do more harm than good. So long as the Bible is held to be a finality; a Procrustean bed to lop off and deter progress; a stereotyped and unchangeable religion—so long must it be of very evil influence upon those by whom it is thus held, and so long will they be liable to be prejudiced against it, who regard nothing as too good to be under the law of growth and progress, and nothing as so good that, in an age of great and general improvement, it can not become better.

By this time my readers may be ready to ask me, how we can learn religion, if neither the theologies, nor the “Sacred Books” from which they are derived, can be depended upon as infallible teachers? I answer, that we are to learn it just as we learn all other things—by the action of the understanding upon facts. Until we take this only way to learn it, superstition will continue to usurp the place of religion, and the miseries, which ever attend upon the one, will continue to shut out the blessedness which is ever united with the other. After saying this, I scarcely need add, that I do not regard religion as a mystery. I mean by it the knowledge of our duties and the discharge of them. In the last year (1865) has appeared in our country a very eloquent and brilliant book, a leading idea in which is that the understanding can not discover religion, and that it is by means of a spiritual intuition or some faculty other than the understanding that religion can be discovered. Is not a similar

idea found in the pages of Schleiermacher, and in the beautiful Quaker fancy of the “inner light?” No wonder that the author of this book says: “Religion needs mystery, and can not exist without it.” But no theologies, that are largely made up of imagination and mystery—not even the refined theology of the book in question—can stand the increasingly severe tests of advancing science. A matter-of-fact theology—a theology, which, instead of cherishing mysteries, tends to dispel them—is the only one that can stand these tests. With the least possible delay then should the nations get rid of the existing theologies, and set up in their stead a rational and scientific explanation of religion. To postpone this duty is to postpone the day when religion shall rest on a sure foundation—on the rock of facts. It is to leave religion, which should ever be recognized as founded in and identified with unmistakable nature, to be confounded with speculations upon the supernatural, and dreams of the unknown.

I spoke of the necessity of learning religion from facts. But may they not be the facts of history?—of the Bible and other books? No, the facts even of modern histories, and even of our own enlightened times, are quite too uncertain to be confidently adopted even by the philosopher or statesman. How emphatically too uncertain, then, for the foundation of religion —(a foundation which needs to be the surest of all sure things)—must be the facts of those ancient histories, such as the Bible, written in unscientific and superstitious ages, and stuffed with grotesque and absurd myths and legends! Of all mistakes the most fatal is to take up with a historical religion. Even if it were the pure and true religion, when it came into the stream of history, what right have we to flatter ourselves that it has not, long since, become a corrupt and false one? For what is there which that stream leaves as it found it? Nay, what is there which even begins its historical character in its entirely true character? Surely, God has not left us to get our religion from a source so uncertain and so corrupt as history.

What, then, are the facts by its right action on which the understanding can discover religion? They are the earth and what—man preëminently included—pertains to it, with so much of the surrounding skies and worlds as science brings within

our knowledge. But are here *data* enough from which to learn religion? If not enough, they are, however, all we have. But they are enough. From them we can learn, amongst other things, our relations and duties to our fellow-men. And if we do not choose to stop here with the disciples of Comte, and to worship nothing higher than Humanity, we can go on to learn from the same *data* our relations and duties to God. Here is enough from which to infer the wisdom, power, and goodness of Him from whom have come the earth and the sky. And in this power, wisdom, and goodness, there is enough to teach us what love, gratitude, and worship we owe Him. It is emphatically true as the poet teaches, that we can look "through nature up to nature's God." He is known by His works.

"If such the sweetness of the streams,
What must the fountain be!"

In this wise the studious and right-hearted can not fail to know much of Him, and to commune with Him. My understanding, which has convinced me of the qualities of my neighbor, has also convinced me of what I owe him. In like manner are my convictions of the character of God followed by my convictions of what I owe God. But, although we can learn much of God from His works—much of the supernatural from the natural—I, nevertheless, would refrain from going to supernaturalism for the solution of religious problems. We need not go to it, because nature is sufficient to this end; and we should not go to it because supernaturalism is but an inference, and inferences from inferences are to be more or less distrusted—at least, in matters of great moment.

Nature alone is the standpoint and standard in human reasonings. All admit it is in all things but religion. They should admit it is in that also. Nothing is more natural than love, which is so emphatically the chief exercise of religion that Paul resolves religion into the loving of one's neighbor as himself. But this is only loving naturally. For what can be more natural than to love, even as we love ourself, him who has rights and interests like to and equal to our own? To be religious, then, is simply to be natural. That a man, perplexed with problems in mathematics and mechanics, should invoke

supernatural knowledge would not be the strangest of things. But as well might we look above the nature of water to learn that its law is to run down hill, as to look above human nature to learn that religion or love is its law. The germs of religion, and the faculties for maturing and unfolding them, so far from being foreign to our nature, are born with us, and are, as much as our muscles, a part of our nature. The water may get dammed up and turned backward. So a man may pervert his nature, and stifle his love and the other affections of religion, and sink himself in selfishness. But if he will return to his nature, these affections will again be in exercise. He will again love ; and, if he become entirely natural, he will love his neighbor even as himself.

I have now indicated the only true foundation of the only true religion. It is palpable, certain facts. Do I number God's Spirit amongst these facts ? I do not—for I am not certain that it is amongst them. I believe it is. I believe that it, as much as matter, is a part of the eternal constitution of nature. I believe it pervades the universe ; that all men can receive of it; and that its power is such as to work in him, who opens wide his mind and heart to it, a change so great as to be comparable to a new birth, and a resulting blessedness, which Jesus well calls "The Kingdom of God." I believe, too, that this being "born again," be it in this or in any coming stage of our existence, is the only door into this Kingdom. I speak less confidently of this regenerating power, because I speak from observation instead of experience ; and can only say that I believe I have, in here and there a beautiful and sublime life, seen strong proof of it. Jesus was sure of the reality of this power ; and he was sure of it because he felt that he had the witness of it in himself. But whether they be few or many who have experienced this power, certain it is that vast numbers have, from what has passed in their own bosoms, been sure, not only that God is a Spirit, but that he gives his Spirit to the children of men. Yes, I believe in this Divine gift, and that it is by its help that men have hitherto made so great progress, and will hereafter make so much greater, in the knowledge of Divine things.

And here, too, I may be asked whether I number God's

providence amongst these fundamental facts of religion. I answer that, on the one hand, I do, if His providence means His constant energizing of His laws, and His constant and changeless working through these constant and changeless laws; and that, on the other hand, I do not, if it means that He occasionally overturns them, and plants special providences upon their ruins. Such providences may bring present relief to this man, and temporary benefit to that man; but if they are at the expense of the steady operation of the great laws adapted to mankind, they must be at the expense of mankind. Moreover, what can be worse for men than their habit of presumptuous reliance on special providences to deliver them from the straits to which their folly and rashness have reduced them, and to save them in their sin of violating the laws of their being?

So, also, I may be asked whether I give "immortality" a place amongst these fundamental facts. I do not—for I am not certain that man is immortal. The arguments in favor of it, which, on one occasion and another I have made, satisfied myself. But neither did they satisfy all my hearers and readers, nor produce in myself the sense of entire certainty. But do I hold that men can love and worship God without being assured of their immortality? Certainly I do. So majestic is this being which He has given to us; so rich in its endowments; so large in its capacities for holiness, happiness, and usefulness, that even though we were sure it ends with this life, there would still remain abundant reason why we should love Him with the whole heart, and serve and honor Him with all our powers. Abundant, too, would be our reason for rejoicing with the "Positivist," that the individual man, though ceasing to exist, shall, nevertheless, live in his race. And, surely, if the "Positivist" can live for others (*pour autrui*) and worship humanity, we, with our more comprehensive faith, can also live for others, and worship the God of Humanity.

And what of Eternal Punishment? Do I place that amongst the facts on which Religion rests? I answer that I believe in no God-inflicted punishment. Punishment in the next life there doubtless will be; and I know not but it will, in some instances, be eternal. It will, however, be all self-inflicted. That is, it will all grow out of the character and conduct of the

sufferer; and if that character and conduct can be bad forever, then must he suffer forever.

Alas, that Christendom went to the Jewish theology for her apprehensions and knowledge of God!—to that theology which teaches that he is but a big man!—the subject of human changes and caprices, now melted into sorrow, and now maddened into fury! Alas, that she did not go straight to Nature, to God's own works and ways, for there she would have learned that He is our Friend and Father; that He is never angry with even the worst of us; that He curses none, and blesses all who will let Him bless them! With what agonizing earnestness are men seeking the Divine forgiveness of their sins! But, surely, it is in no common sense of the word, that God forgives His children. He has kept no account against them, and there is therefore nothing for Him to forgive. He but loves and pities all who are in the bondage of sin; and He never ceases to hold out His delivering hand to them. Dear Morris Ketchum did not render due honor to the state of his own heart, when he told his unfortunate son that he forgave him. For the words might imply that there could have been a case in which he would not have forgiven him. But no such case could have been presented to such a father's heart. How much less would the Great Father be unforgiving to his child—even to his worst child! Nay, the petition for His forgiveness, if offered in the common acceptation of the word, wrongs and dishonors Him.

The Old Testament, because abounding in these horrible views of God, has, notwithstanding the precious and sublime truths scattered through it, wrought immeasurable misery and debasement wherever ignorance and superstition have acknowledged its authority; and even the New Testament is not so clear of these views as to leave its value half what it would have been without them. The Apostles were not entirely rid of them: and even in some of the words ascribed to Jesus, an indorsement of these views is not entirely wanting. But, whilst it is improbable that we have a large share of his best sayings, it is also improbable that he said all which is credited to him. Words entirely out of harmony with his general utterances and general character we should be unwilling to believe to be his words. And do I, then, make it simply a question

of human reason what of Jesus to believe, and what not? I do. And nothing can be more unreasonable than to bow to history with all the submission due to mathematical certainties. History has been said to be a lie; and what history is there so entirely free from falsehoods as to be able to look this saying full in the face?

By the way, this doctrine of Eternal Punishment is sustained mainly by one word, which is ascribed, no one knows whether rightly or wrongly, to Jesus—a word, moreover, that has come down to us through no one knows how many translations, and with what changes, therefore, of its sense; for scholars no more agree what language it was originally recorded in, than they do as to the number of the previous years in which it was a mere tradition, and was, as well as its context, subject to the uncertainties and variations of a mere tradition.

Is the Devil one of the facts on which the true religion rests? He is not. He is a mere myth. Nevertheless, no actual being has grown so fast as has this purely imaginary one. He has grown from a principle into a person; from a servant of God into a rival of God; from a force in the physical world into a co-ruler in the spiritual. In the earliest notices of the Devil, or rather of the germs of the Devil, he is but the principle of evil. Then he rises into an agent of evil—only, however, in the external world. For it was many ages before the ancients came to recognize a power for evil, or even a power for good, in the moral world. They saw the goodness of God only in the sunshine and rain, and other welcome phenomena of nature. They saw the malignity of the Devil only in the tornado and lightning and other destructive agencies of nature. But, during the last two or three thousand years, and especially in Christendom, the Devil has become a power in the moral and spiritual world—a greater actual power than even God Himself—with millions of followers where God has but hundreds. The only relief under his present sway is the promise that it shall have an end. But when that end is to come no mortal knows.

To the honor of the early Jews, there was no Devil in their theology. The Jews, who were carried to Babylon, appear to have learned and believed somewhat of him during their captivity. The early Jews needed no Devil, for they believed in

no Hell—no Hell, as the word is now popularly understood. The first Christians, had they drawn their creed from the Old Testament and old Jewish theology only, would have had in it neither Hell nor Devil. But they evidently blended with that theology Greek and Roman mythology. Even Christ himself gave proof of this. For the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is evidently constructed upon the classical mythological idea of the future life. According to this idea, only a river or gulf separates the blessed from the tormented. But, although it is impassable, it is not so wide as to prevent conversation between them.

That Christendom, with all its increasing light, should still believe in the Devil is, indeed, a very remarkable fact. It shows how mighty is the ecclesiastical power. Not to believe in the Devil would be not to believe in Hell; and the Devil and Hell are the foundation on which that power rests. Knock away this foundation, and the orthodox theology must fall, and also the churches built upon it. By the way, how much such forcible preachers as Jonathan Edwards and Nathaniel Emmons must have done to confirm and spread the most horrific ideas of Hell and the Devil! How many tens of thousands have been made wretched through life by their pictures of the torments of the damned and of the delights of the blessed in those torments! Emmons is careful to add that, in some instances, their delights will be in the torments “of their own children, parents, husbands, wives, and friends.” No wonder that the childhood of dear Horace Mann was made miserable by the sermons he heard from the lips of Emmons!

Nevertheless, this modern faith in the Devil is a great improvement upon that ancient faith from which the Devil was omitted. The hypothesis of a Devil is a great relief to the character of the theological God. If there is a Devil’s work to do, then by all means let there be a Devil to do it. Do not let God’s hands be dirtied and bloodied by it.

The theologies have a Devil’s work to do; and therefore they have a Devil. Gratefully and gladly do I turn away from them to the religion of reason—a religion in which there is no Hell, no Devil, no co-ruler with God, no malignant rival of the loving Father.

Whether I make belief in the Trinity fundamental to a true religious faith, may be another inquiry. A three-headed serpent is a disgusting and abhorrent monster. So is a three-headed God. And what less than this is the Trinity, which is found in so many theologies? Why need we suppose that there are three persons in God? To explain what phenomena is this supposition necessary? What attributes or sympathies does the Great Father lack which makes it necessary to assume the existence of another Deity; or, if the expression be preferred, another person in the Godhead? How derogatory to Him is the hypothesis that there is not in Him all that is needed in God!—that if, for instance, He have the father's wisdom and strength, He nevertheless lacks the mother's tenderness and love!

Alas! how much the world has lost by the deifying of Christ! This incomparably best of all the specimens of manhood might ere this, had he been left in his manhood, have become the chosen and cited example of all the races of men. But by the lifting of him up out of manhood into Godhood, he comparatively ceases to be an example. On the supposition that he is God, his words and deeds, matchlessly sublime as many of them are, excite in us comparatively little interest and no wonder. But that they are the words and deeds of a mere man awakens all our admiration, and encourages us with the hope that we too, if we shall earnestly endeavor to live the Christ-life, will be enabled to speak Christ-words, and do Christ-deeds. That they are merely human words and human deeds proves what possibilities of wisdom and goodness lie infolded in human nature; and that these possibilities were so developed in the life of one man is an example to inspire their development in the life of every other man. The theological view of Christ, by putting him hopelessly beyond human imitation, makes him well-nigh useless as our example.

That Jesus was both claimed and believed to be a God is not strange. The usage of thus accounting for and thus honoring extraordinary gifts and marked eminence had not yet ceased. The Greeks and Romans had long been wont to deify their idolized heroes and philosophers. The story of Christ's conception is but a substantial repetition of the story of Plato's.

I say that the deification of Christ and of thousands of others is not strange. But that the ignorant past should have power to drag down the enlightened present into this exceedingly low superstition is, indeed, strange.

Jesus is called the Incarnate God. But God has incarnated Himself in all men. So inherent and structural is He in them, that they are well said to be made in His image! It is true that, whilst some men are so spiritual as to be ever filling themselves with God, others are so depraved as to be ever emptying themselves of Him. Nevertheless, all men are made to be receptacles of God; and it is but their own fault if they are not filled with Him. That one so filled with the Divine Spirit as was Jesus, should feel and even declare himself to be one with God, is not to be wondered at. We too, were we so filled with it, would, probably, not think it presumptuous to feel and claim this oneness.

The fact that Jesus was so immeasurably above his fellow-men is often turned into a defiant argument for his Deityship by those who deny that such a fact could occur in the course of providence. There is, however, many a wondrous effect, the causes of which are hidden from us, but which we, nevertheless, do not doubt are causes in the course of providence. A wondrous effect, all the providential causes of which we are very far from knowing, was three such contemporaries, in one little island, as Shakespeare, Bacon, and Milton. Each of them was in his own way an unsurpassed genius. Jesus was a genius in morals; and, as such, stands without a rival. I have often thought, when inquiring into the causes of his preëminence, how highly probable it is that the conditions of a true marriage, and for the production of a pure, sublime, and God-like offspring, met remarkably in the parents of Jesus. The Catholic Church has, indeed, no little show of reason for claiming that Mary was immaculate; and no less would it have for the like claim in behalf of Joseph.

The next inquiry may be whether I put the Atonement amongst the things on which the true religion is built. Most emphatically not. This doctrine, that "without shedding of blood is no remission," and that with it there is—a doctrine which has come down to us through so many Pagan channels—

is quite too flatly in the face of nature and reason to find favor with those who feel themselves bound to bring all things to the tests of nature and reason. That every man must suffer for his own sins, be they against his physical or moral constitution, and that no other one can relieve him of the scars and consequences, is a truth lying quite too deep in nature and reason to be subverted by any thing to the contrary—least of all, by what is so uncertain as history, and so absurd as the theologies.

Furthermore, I can not believe in the Atonement, because I can not believe in any one of the three things, belief in all of which is essential to belief in it.

1st. I can not believe that God, in whose great loving heart there is nothing to be appeased, instituted those bloody sacrifices in which the doctrine of the Atonement is founded. It was mistaken and cruel Pagan superstition which instituted them. Alas! how mistaken in supposing God to be the enemy of the wicked, when their enemy is themselves, and He is their friend!—in supposing Him to pour out curses upon the wicked, when it is they who curse themselves, and He is working to withhold them from the self-infliction! And, alas! how cruel those abominable sacrifices which doomed the innocent animal to a premature slaughter, and wasted the food which belonged to the hungry poor!

2d. I do not believe that the Father has provided an eternal hell, nor, indeed, any hell for His children. Whatever hell they find here or hereafter, they make for themselves. He makes only heavens for them; and if they do not enter them, it is only because they will not.

3d. I do not believe that Christ is God. But, according to the theory of the Atonement, it requires the sacrifice of God to save sinners from an eternal hell. And here, by the way, we have another instance of the theological circular reasoning. The sacrificed God proves the eternal hell, and the eternity of the punishment proves that there could be no less sacrifice.

Whilst I do not believe that Christ's death has taken away the sin of any, be they believers or unbelievers in Him, I do, however, believe that He died for all. And I further believe that, by looking habitually and lovingly unto Him—unto this

preëminent Son and best representative of his Father—we come to hate the sins which he hated and to love the virtues which he loved. In a word, we come to love him and be like him, and to find that, through his teachings and examples, he has become our savior.

I pass on to speak of Prophecy. Do I believe it to be one of the necessary facts in the true religion? I do not believe it to be a fact at all. 1st. I do not know but the ancient prophecy was after the event. 2d. I do not know that the event was the very thing foretold. 3d. I do not know but the prophecy was generally the discernment of mere human foresight, instead of the inspired foretelling gift—which prophecy is claimed to be. As the modern world has never seen a prophet—a technical and inspired prophet—it should be very slow to believe that there ever was or, indeed, ever will be one. It is said that departed spirits can prophesy through us. I do not know how that is. But that men in the flesh have this gift or inspiration requires proof.

And now to the Miracles. Is faith in them essential to a true religious faith? For one, I believe that there never was, and that there never will be, a miracle—that is, an arrest or suspension of the laws of nature. And I not only believe in, but I am content with, the never-failing constancy of those laws. I would let water remain water always, though there are many who rejoice in the fancy that, for once, it was turned into wine. Her seals of death, wherever nature places them, I would leave honored and unbroken. But there are many who, desiring an occasional triumph over her, even at this point, would have her now and then thrust aside, and her dead men called to life.

I do not believe in miracles, for I have never seen any, and I know no man who says he has seen any. Persons are reported to have seen the Bible miracles, but I know neither them nor their reporters, nor how far any of them are entitled to confidence. What array, however, of human testimony should suffice to convince me of the truth of miracles?—of the truth of the claim that nature does sometimes escape from the control of her own laws? Nowhere in the world of facts—not in astronomy, nor in geology, nor elsewhere—is there the slightest proof of such escape. On the other hand, what is less to be relied on

than human testimony?—often deceiving others and often itself deceived? So, the least which can be said is, that if miracles were ever necessary to authenticate religion, they are necessary now. Nay, in that case, the perpetual performance of them is a necessity. Another reason why I object to belief in physical miracles is, that it opens the door for belief in moral miracles—for belief in the variation, and even the reversal, of the fundamental rules of morality. Denying that the body can die, or that when dead, it must remain dead, can consistently be followed by denying that, “the soul that sinneth, it shall die.” In other words, to deny certainty to nature in her moral laws is no less unreasonable than to deny it to her in her physical laws. Another objection to believing in the miracles is, that it virtually denies our capacity to learn the truth, which we need to learn, and which we were, therefore, made to learn. And such believing is to be objected to, not only because it is derogatory to the high powers of human nature, but because it implies that God is driven to violate His laws, in order to correct the blunder He fell into in His work of constructing it.

I notice, of late, that the more cultivated of those who cling to the Bible miracles resort, in increasing numbers, to an expedient for saving themselves from indorsing the monstrous and even blasphemous absurdity that God is, now and then, guilty of violating His own laws, in order to get Himself out of an occasional pinch. But they only make bad worse. “They jump out of the frying-pan into the fire.” Their expedient is to call the miracles but seeming, instead of real, violations of the fixed laws of the universe. They take the ground that the performers of the miracles had only more knowledge of these laws than the ignorant spectators had; and that the miracles, whilst appearing to the spectators to go counter to the laws, were, nevertheless, really concurrent with them. But this solution of the difficulty makes the performers, including Jesus himself, impostors, for they all knew that the wonders which they are said to have wrought, were fraught with conviction solely because the spectators believed that they were wrought in the very face of nature and against her laws and forces. Manifestly, the performers intended this belief, and rested their success upon it. Surely, if it were only by his superior knowledge of the laws

and forces of nature that Jesus turned the water into wine, the spectators, if they knew this to be so, would not, because of that knowledge and its wondrous products, have regarded him as God, or even as having a special commission from God. They would have regarded him as more learned than themselves—that is all.

Do I regard “Total Depravity” as one of the facts not to be omitted in making up the true religion? It is not a fact. It is but a doctrine. In a depravity which comes of a bad life, I, of course, believe. Perhaps it is quite reasonable to believe in an inborn depravity also. For if it is true that a parent can transmit his diseased physical constitution, why can he not transmit his depraved moral one also? But beside that the moral one is, probably, not, in any instance, totally depraved, this transmission of character from generation to generation is not what the believers in “Total Depravity” have in view when advocating it. With them the depravity is simply a deduction from the fancied “Fall of Man” in the fancied Garden of Eden. Nevertheless, this doctrine is much more than a fancy. It is an essential part of a horrible creed—of a theory which freezes and subdues by its matchless terrors. We have seen that the Atonement and the Eternal Hell are doctrines made for the purpose of fitting them into each other. Also, in constructing the doctrine of “Total Depravity” was mutual support aimed at. It fits into both the others, and they fit into it.

Do I hold that a religion to be sound, must comprise rites and ceremonies? I do not. I have, necessarily, lost my interest in these by losing my interest in the theologies. I know a little church, which gathers every other month around a table to commemorate the love of Christ. The bread is broken and the un intoxicating wine is poured and passed by one and another, women as well as men, and this ceremony is not because of its intrinsic value, but because it affords a surpassingly suitable occasion for conversing about Christ, his life and death, his principles, spirit, and aims. Prayer and singing are intermingled with the conversation, and the hour spent in this wise is felt to be a profitable as well as a pleasant season.

A few words in this connection regarding the Sabbath. It

may be right to give it up. It may be right to make the first day of the week a rest-day. But to say that the first day is the Sabbath is absurd ; and to say that the Bible teaches that the Sabbath is transferred from the seventh to the first day is either delusion or disingenuousness. The simple truth is, that such transfer was a concession to very unworthy considerations. The conscientious and consistent Seventh-Day Baptists and some others cling to the Sabbath. They do so because they cling to the Bible—the whole Bible.

I pass on to say that, whilst the theological religion is a factitious as well as a fictitious religion, made up as well as false, the true religion is identified with nature and reason. It is owing to this distinction that, whilst the true religion obeys the law of progress, the theological religion prides itself in its unchangeableness ; and that whilst the one lives in the present, the other burrows in the past. How boastful, for instance, is Roman Catholicism (and Protestantism is scarcely less so) of being, in this age of light, precisely what it was hundreds of years ago ! In view of this fact, it is, of course, not at all strange that the theological churches oppose Reforms until they begin to be popular. And here we see why it is that the orthodox are obliged to contend for every line in the Bible. Instead of choosing the religion of nature and reason—a religion which they could trustingly and calmly leave to nature and reason to sustain—they have chosen a conventional and artificial religion, which is to be sustained by a body of external evidence. That body is the Bible, and, therefore, to give up a line of the Bible would be to suffer a breach—a perhaps fatal breach—in the evidence of the truth of their religion.

I need say no more in condemnation of the theologies. If the best of them—those which, to the dishonor of Christ, are called the Christian theologies—are, in the main, such bundles of naked assumptions and gross fallacies, any farther argument against them must be quite superfluous.

Why is it that men persist in believing in these preposterous theologies ? It is, first, because they are trained, and this too by means of these theologies, to believe that they have need of a direct revelation from their God of their moral duties ; and, second, because these theologies are at hand to impose on their

credulity, and to proffer themselves as the supply of this need. But all the analogies in the case deny that they have such need. Men have no revelation to teach them how to build a ship or railroad, or cure a bodily disease. God has given them the faculties and opportunities for learning how; and so, too, has He given them the faculties and opportunities, nothing more, for learning their moral duties. It should be added that these moral duties are far more easily learned than are the workmanship and cure referred to. Even childhood is capable of comprehending all that is essential in the one. But it requires a studious and laborious manhood to perform the other. It is often said that God would not leave us without specific and revealed instruction in theology. But He has so left us in the case of geology, astronomy, physiology, and, indeed, all things else. In every branch of knowledge, study, and toil, and not ignorant, indolent receptiveness, is the condition of needful progress.

Great stress is laid on the importance of having our knowledge in the sphere of morals and religion attain to certainty, and hence the argument for a direct revelation of the things of that sphere. But the mistake which lies at the bottom of all this is the underrating of human powers and human dignity. It is not man, but beings of an inferior grade, that need certainty in their knowledge. The beaver and the bee have it in their sure instincts. But man's high faculties supersede the necessity as well of instinctive as of revealed certainty. It is true that, instead of setting out in life, as does the brute, with all the knowledge he needs, he is to labor for it throughout his life. But it is also true that, with the help of those high faculties, he can labor successfully for it. He requires not the sure guidance of either instinct or revelation. Enough for him is it that, by means of those faculties, he can be ever approaching certainty. "The glorious uncertainty of the law," not in an ironical sense only, has become a proverb. But more glorious are the uncertainties in sublime moral and religious truth, through which man must ever be working his way up toward the distant and perhaps never attainable goal of entire certainty. Lessing was right in holding that it is the pursuit more than the possession of truth which ennobles and glorifies man.

But it is said that it is only by revelation that we can acquire certain knowledge of the life to come. Why, however, should we desire this certain knowledge, or, indeed, any knowledge of the life to come? Should we not have so much faith in God as to believe with the whole heart that, when we reach that life, we shall find it just such an one as we need?—a life of joy to the righteous and of improving discipline to the wicked? Moreover, have we, whilst in the earthly life, more than time enough to learn the things which belong to it? But must we not, whilst here, prepare for the next life?—and to this end do we not need a revelation of the things of that life? No. Whilst here, we are to live for this life; and that is our best and, indeed, our only way to prepare for the next. There are many who are habitually leaping over the duties of this life into the heaven they dream of and are impatient for. So, too, there are many who are unfitted for these duties by the hell they dread. But both classes should be absorbed in these duties, and then they would find a heaven, in this life, and be in no danger of finding a hell in another. He is wise and safe who toils to rid the earth of the hell there is upon earth, and to make, right here and even now, the “new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

I must close. A sad thing is it that men are bound up in these theologies. But a sadder thing is the so faint prospect that they will very soon be unbound. The good cling to the theologies for conscience' and also for salvation's sake; and it is but justice to admit that the great mass of the good believe in the theologies. The bad cling to them because, it being for their interest to go with the good, they will ever do so when they can do so cheaply. Moreover, a large share of them hope that by such clinging they will have a better chance to get to heaven. The bare fact that a man has received his theology on Divine authority makes his giving it up well-nigh hopeless. The door is shut against all argument, and whoever would presume to attempt to open it is guilty of the bold blasphemy of bringing forward mere human reasonings against God's unerring word. Even judges and statesmen will consent to let me argue before them. They, of course, see the flaws in my arguments. But, as they are conscious of the fallibility of human reasonings,

their own not excepted, they hear me kindly and respectfully. But I always notice that these orthodox theologians, who fancy that they have a "Thus saith the Lord" for their convictions, refuse me the hearing ear. From the proud eminence of their conscious infallibility they look down upon me with pity and scorn, and sometimes with manifest anger. They let me know, if not always by words, nevertheless by look and manner, that it does not become a *man* to argue against *God*.

How numerous and powerful the institutions and agencies for upholding the theologies and prolonging their existence! Not to look beyond our own country—see the scores of thousands of churches, whose life is in the theologies! See, too, the scores of thousands of their preachers, many of whom, it is true, would still remain faithful and effective preachers of righteousness, but the occupation of more of whom would be gone when the theologies were gone! See, too, the many great schools which represent and serve the theologies; and the Bible, Missionary, and other great societies, which also represent and sustain them! Then, too, our literature is deeply imbued with their spirit. Nay, they are incorporated in it. All their doctrines, even the wildest and worst, are embalmed in it and sanctified by it. Moreover, as men are the subjects of hopes and fears more than of all other affections, their theologies, which are the great fountains of their hopes and fears, must necessarily, more than all other influences, possess and sway them. To let go of the theologies is, in their apprehension, to fail of the heaven they hope for, and to fall into the hell they fear. And, then, to give up the theological religion, with all its poetry and pictures, its touching stories and frequent eloquence—to give it up for a matter-of-fact religion—to give up a religion so juicy and so decorated, in exchange for the dry, flowerless, leafless religion of reason—oh! the mere thought of it is unbearable!

I must not fail to add that the upholding of the theologies is regarded as an indispensable public policy. The terrors which they inspire are largely relied on to maintain society, and to maintain the State. The reliance is by no means misplaced.

"The fear o' hell's a hangman's whip
To haul the wretch in order."

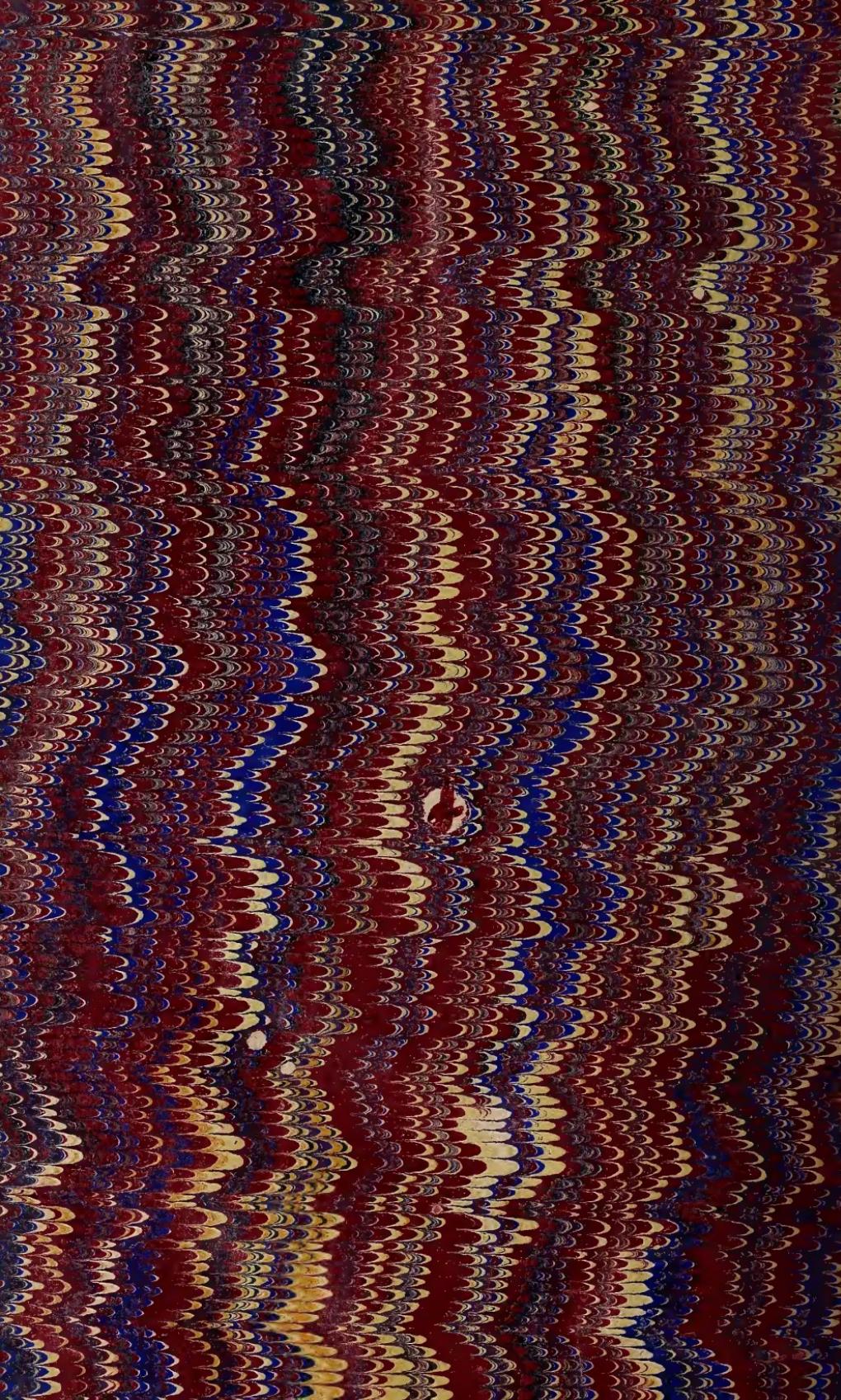
And yet how poor the society, composed of the superstitions-bound and fear-shriveled, compared with the society which will be, when reason shall have driven out superstition, and the courage which accompanies reason shall have taken the place of the present cowardice! And of how low and mean a type is the State, whose subjects are too far unmanned by theological horrors to be able to face either priest or politician, compared with what the State will be when its subjects, enlightened by science and swayed by reason, shall be self-poised and self-governing!

In view of all this, and of much more to the same end, the overthrow of the theologies seems to be not only difficult and distant, but well-nigh impossible. Nevertheless, as they are, in the main, fanciful and false, we are sure that they can not stand forever. Nay, we may hope that, should the very rapid progress of the last three or four generations in science and general intelligence continue three or four generations longer, the power of the theologies will be broken throughout our country, and, may be, throughout the world. But, be the day of deliverance from this burden of burdens, and this curse of curses, sooner or later, it will be then, and not till then, that Humanity will have fully entered upon a new life—a life of science instead of superstition, of fact instead of fancy, of wisdom instead of folly, of happiness instead of misery. One, and only one, religion will then be seen to have survived the wreck of the theological religions—of those religions in which so much that is false and evil blends with so much that is true and good; so much that is fanciful, grotesque, fanatical, horrible, with so much that is beautiful and sublime. This surviving religion is the manly and matter-of-fact religion of reason. It is the religion taught by Jesus. It is the religion which, he and his preëminent apostle taught, has but one rule, and this rule so simple that all can understand it, and so obviously true that all are convinced of the truth of it. *DO AS YOU WOULD BE DONE BY* is this rule.

“Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: FOR THIS IS THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS.”—*Jesus.*

“For ALL the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”—*Paul.*







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